

LESSONS FROM THE HISTORY OF AGRICULTURE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. SMITH] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, you know, we are a young Nation, and our focus is forward with only an occasional glance back at the lessons of Athens or Rome or even the lessons of the dust bowl in this country.

But this House is soon going to consider an important issue that requires a deeper look back so we can better plan ahead.

We will soon consider a farm bill that warrants an examination of the history of agriculture and a study of the lessons learned. There is a lineage between the modern American farmer and the ancient Sumerian who worked the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates. It is an equality of importance. Both were responsible, indeed farmers throughout history have been responsible for their countries' civilizations.

It has been said that in the last reckoning, all things are purchased with food. This was true with the cradle of civilization, and it holds true now. Today, American agriculture is this country's largest industry. Agriculture accounts for a full 16 percent of our current gross domestic product, \$355 billion worth of food and fiber were produced this past year. That is more than any other industry.

And so it is especially critical that we learn the lessons taught by the successes and failures of the past. History is awash with the remains of societies that failed their farmers and ultimately failed to maintain their soil and who let it succumb to erosion and certainly that resulted in a fall of their civilization.

Cities like ancient Babylon, 2,600 years ago, developed a productive agriculture. It allowed their civilization to grow to 17 million people and a remarkably diversified society. King Nebuchadnezzar boasted, "That which no king has done before, I did. Great canals I dug and brought abundant waters to all the people." But agriculture and farmers became a lesser priority in that country, and ultimately failed.

Today, the site of Babylon is desolation, a dry land, and the promised land 3,000 years after Moses, he called it the land of milk and honey, now barren and rugged, the victim of soil erosion. Only dregs of fertile soil remain at the bottoms of narrow valleys.

But there are also successes. Societies with plans maintaining farmers and maintaining agriculture survived and flourished. For the last 1,000 years, farmers in the French Alps have terraced hillsides dramatically in an effort to prevent soil loss, resulting in continuously fertile soil, fertile agriculture and abundant production.

Essentially, countries that practice a careful stewardship of the Earth's resources through terracing, crop rota-

tion and other sound conservation measures have flourished for centuries. Dr. W.C. Lowdermilk, of the Soil Conservation Service, reported in 1953. Forty-two years have not changed that.

In the U.S. Congress we are now engaged in a great agricultural debate. We are deciding what proper role the Federal Government has in Federal agricultural policy.

It is important that the American people understand that agricultural programs have been designed to encourage a continuous, but slight, overproduction. Farm prices have been kept low.

Most farmers over the past 50 years have experienced subsistence standards of living, mostly because of the agricultural farm programs.

A goal of those programs has been to keep enough farmers and ranchers producing so that an abundant supply would result in not only lower food and fiber prices in this country, but huge exports of commodities that has eventually assisted in our balance of trade.

For 60 years, we have enticed farmers to become more and more dependent on Government subsidy programs. As we move to a more market-oriented farm policy, it is important that we do it gradually and we do it smartly to make sure we do not endanger this productive and efficient industry of American agriculture.

American consumers now spend 9.5 percent of their take-home dollars for food. With that 9.5 percent they are able to buy the best-quality, lowest-priced food anywhere in the world.

In our haste, we cannot jeopardize the survival of American agriculture or the economic strength of our country.

HONORING ST. LOUIS CITY HALL EMPLOYEES FOR THEIR EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF VICTIMS' FAMILIES OF OKLAHOMA CITY TRAGEDY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Missouri [Mr. GEPHARDT] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GEPHARDT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor St. Louis City Hall employees for their efforts on behalf of the victims and families of the Oklahoma City tragedy. The Recorder of Deeds, Sharon Quigley Carpenter, and her staff organized a fund-raiser in conjunction with other departments in City Hall and raised a total of \$3,415.50. In addition, city hall employees sent a sympathy card to Oklahoma City signed by hundreds of people who either worked or came into City Hall on business.

The initiative taken by the employees at St. Louis City Hall demonstrates their caring spirit. It is a model of action stimulated by compassion and empathy. I want to salute these employees for their selfless and generous contributions to the victims of Oklahoma City.

STATE OF EMERGENCY IN GOVERNMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of May

12, 1996, the gentleman from New York [Mr. OWENS] is recognized for 1 hour as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, there is a state of emergency with respect to decisionmaking right here in this capital right now, and there are large numbers who do not recognize the fact that there is a state of emergency.

We are faced with an unprecedented situation. Government is about to make a dramatic change, and most people, most groups who are going to be victimized by this dramatic change, do not quite seem to understand that there is no miracle in the offing, nothing will save us from the kind of decisionmaking that is taking place now which will result in some devastating cuts in program that benefit large numbers of the American people.

There is a state of emergency, and we should understand that there is a state of emergency. Those who do not understand that we are caught up in extremism, driven by the radical right, public policy is being driven toward a dangerous cliff. We are going to go over that cliff if we do not summon our forces and begin to fight back and understand the kind of problem we face.

To approach extremism and to try to combat extremism with moderation is to guarantee defeat. We must summon up the same kind of intensity that is being summoned against us. We must defend ourselves with the same kind of intensity.

Let us take a look at the budget making process that is now begun. We have already passed the House of Representatives budget. The ruling majority, the Republicans, have passed a budget already. The Senate has passed a budget, and the Senate and House budgets do not differ dramatically. There are draconian cuts in both budgets.

Granted, the Senate's wisdom seems to be to move much slower than the House budget, and that is under negotiation now, the House budget versus the Senate budget, two Republican majorities negotiating with each other.

But there is extremism in both. Never before in the history of the country, this Nation has never seen before such drastic changes being pushed over such a short period of time.

There is a document that was issued by the Republican majority in the House called "Cutting Government," and I have it in my hand. Cutting Government was issued, and it is an indication of what was passed in the Republican majority's budget in the House of Representatives. Cutting Government summarizes extreme changes that are being proposed, extreme, and the sooner we all understand it, the better we will be able to marshal some kind of appropriate defense.

Let me just read the first paragraph of the Cutting Government document. It reads as follows: "The House committee on the budget proposes to terminate, block grant or privatize three Cabinet departments, 284 programs, 69